**Portfolio Reflections**

**(Part VI b)**

**Essential Questions**

1. What have you learned about yourself as a person and as a gifted specialist that will be most beneficial to you as you continue your teaching career?

I have learned not to judge any teacher based on what I observe from the other side of the hallway! For the past two years, I have worked furiously to finish a Masters in Gifted Education while teaching in a regular education classroom. This has created a constant internal struggle for me in terms of what I feel I SHOULD be doing and what I am REQUIRED to do with regards to the constraints of public education. Before I was held accountable for both gifted ed and regular ed in the same room, I thought I had differentiation all figured out. But, as I grew as a gifted educator, I was also focused on meeting the needs of ALL the children in my room and I realized that I had gaps in my skill set for teaching the lower end of the spectrum. These students deserve my very best, also, so my work is never done!

1. How have the relationships you have established within your school (e.g., with students, collaborative/cluster teacher, other teachers, counselors, staff, administrators) and outside of school (e.g., with parents, other gifted specialists, university personnel) helped you to become an effective gifted specialist?

Having had the unique experience of teaching gifted with an endorsement from another state and then being thrust back into the regular classroom has enabled me to live with “one foot in each world”-gifted and regular education. That being said, I have made the best of friends with colleagues in gifted ed and regular ed. My growing expertise in gifted has enabled me to really make a difference in my school. I believe that if I had been teaching resource all this time, I would not have been able to affect as much change in the day to day curriculum for my school’s students. Additionally, being in the regular classroom again has helped me to understand what is truly needed of me once I am in resource later. I will serve the teachers of my school, not just my students, as a RESOURCE.

1. What important lessons have you learned about implementing differentiated instruction, the development and preparation of a concept-based curriculum unit, your knowledge of gifted/talented students, and the inclusion of creative and critical thinking skills?

I have learned that in order to implement differentiated instruction, I need to plan, plan, plan! But, then I need to be ready to change the plan! I learned through my planning for this year that the units I create will need to be fluid. They will need to be based on “big ideas” and specific skill sets. Not all 7-8 year olds are able to reach the level of abstract thinking that my previous groups have been. From now on, I will approach each unit with a big idea in mind, but I will allow the unit to evolve with the unit. If I remain in regular education, I will need to think very critically about how I will address the course of study AND the enrichment that is so needed. The pace at which we must teach in regular ed makes depth of knowledge really tricky, so this is something I will continue to strive for. I have also learned that with very young children, critical thinking skills and creativity must be on-going. They are not going to learn the skills and be able to implement them in one day, or even one week.

1. How have you fostered the creation and advancement of an engaging and effective learning environment for high-ability students?

I have fostered the creation and advancement of an engaging and effective learning environment for high ability students through the wise use of my district’s resources to purchase an enormous amount of technology tools. Additionally, I used funds from achieving National Board Certification to purchase many trade games, books and electronic devices to foster independent learning in my classroom. Students in my classroom move around at will during the day to use various resources to aid in their development and learning. It is not unusual for a student in my room to spend up to an hour each day exploring a self-guided lesson or self-motivated research.

**In your summary reflection, please address these questions related to your participation in Samford University’s gifted education program:**

1. In what ways has Samford’s gifted education program helped you develop a sense of efficacy as a gifted specialist during the past year?

My experienceat Samford has helped me develop in so many ways, both in and out of my classroom. I feel that I will be an exemplary gifted specialist after graduating from Samford, because the coursework I have completed is grounded in research and practical experience. The balance between the work in class and the work I have done in practicum have prepared me to take on the responsibility of the gifted specialist.

1. What aspects of the gifted education program at Samford did you find to be personally challenging?

My biggest personal challenge during my time at Samford was balancing my responsibilities as a regular education classroom teacher and implementing the expected differentiation. While I am well aware that this is best practice and I will continue to do my best to live up to these expectations, it has not been easy. The good in this realization is that as a gifted specialist, I will never expect it to be easy for the classroom teacher to understand what I’m trying to implement!

1. What experiences during your participation in the gifted education program did you find to be most personally rewarding?

The most personally rewarding experiences during this process include modeling for my son that a strong work ethic and discipline will help one attain difficult goals and the collaboration that the program encouraged me to do with my peers in the program and with my team at school.